



LIARD RIVER INDIANS.

of from seventy-five to a hundred yards on all sides.

It seemed advisable, also, on account of having brought with me on the sledge sufficient provisions for present needs, to leave the cache unopened until I had done my best to rid myself of the Indians. Had it been necessary, I could have rolled the heavy logs from the top of my board without assistance, but I could not have put them back again unaided, and as the Indians are somewhat timid about breaking into a cache, I knew that it would be much easier to keep them from pilfering before I opened it than afterward.

Even so, my situation was a trying one. Here I was with an outfit weighing a ton, to be taken down the river, without a boat, and, worse still, with no one to help me build one. The three men I had counted on for this emergency had deserted. Nor was there assistance within available distance. The nearest settlement to which I might appeal was a Hudson Bay trading post on the Liard, one hundred and fifty miles down stream, which I could not reach without sacrificing my cache to the Indians. I resolved, therefore, to remain, and trust to diplomacy and my knowledge of local customs and superstitions to bring me safely out of my predicament. Among other

things, I decided carefully to avoid any quarrel with my neighbors, to be firm, never to show fear, to refuse absolutely all demands, and always to be ready for self-defence. I slept under the two big trees in the clearing as I had planned, certain that no one could approach unseen. As an added precaution, however, I always tied Zilla on one side of my bed, and placed three loaded rifles with extra ammunition on the other.

For many days I kept my lonesome watch. I was beginning to feel worn out and very nervous, and had about concluded that, after all, I had over-estimated the possible dangers from the renegades. The snow had by this time quite disappeared from the little clearing, but was about eight inches deep in the timber. During the day it grew soft, but at night a hard crust formed over the top.

One night, having taken my usual precautions, I was awakened by a low growl from Zilla, and presently, just behind me, I heard footsteps in the snow at the edge of the timber. Raising myself on my blankets, at the same time keeping perfectly still, I listened. I could hear the steps plainly, a regular tramp, tramp, tramp, as though the prowler were moving slowly and cautiously along the edge of the clearing. The event I had been so long awaiting had at last come. Now that the rascals were surrounding me, preparing to seize upon my life and belongings, I was conscious that my heart was



THE AUTHOR'S CAMP IN THE FOREST.